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GEORGIA

Alex Stapleton

From: John Anderson
Sent: Tuesday, August 17, 2010 1:08 PM
To: John Anderson
Attachments: ABK and SO report excerpts.doc; georgia clips0816.doc

Greetings all, and sorry for the impersonal note. Just wanted to briefly look ahead to August 26, which is the two-year anniversary of Russia's recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia. And I simply wanted to be a little proactive and provide you with a few materials that could come in handy should someone somewhere do or say something unpredictable. I'm sure it could never happen, in which case perhaps this email could spark an idea for a story.

There have, of course, been numerous stories recently directly related to – or at least grazing -- S. Ossetia and Abkhazia, most notably the ICJ Kosovo ruling (which some – not Georgia -- saw as an international precedent), Georgia's release of a new occupation strategy governing its relations with the two provinces, the recent disclosure by Russia of S-300 missile deployment in Abkhazia, and of course the anniversary of the war. I am happy to provide clips on any and all of these topics. Meanwhile.....

Should anyone wonder about life in ABK and SO and/or Russian behavior there, ICG, HRW and State have written reports about it, and I have attached a note with excerpts and links.

Also, there has been some superb writing recently on things Georgian, and I've included an attachment with the pieces in this order: McCain wrote a great Op-Ed in the Wash Post on the anniversary of the war that touched on many key themes. Other very strong Op-Eds by Denis MacShane in the Guardian and Melik Kaylan in the WSJ. Brian Whitmore and James Traub both wrote excellent essays in Foreign Policy. Eli Lake did a very solid analysis in the Wash Times and the Jamestown Foundation has an interesting take on the announcement of Russia's S-300 deployment. If you are wondering about a more official take on the Russia's occupation and IDPs, there is a Global Post op-ed by Temuri Yakobashvili, Georgia's Deputy PM, on the country's new occupation strategy; if you're looking for info on the ICJ's Kosovo ruling and what it means to Georgia, there's a Huff Po op-ed from By Payam Akhavan, a law professor at McGill who is Georgia's counsel before the ICJ.

The clips I sent out on 8/10 included a few stories on some of these topics as well. And I would note again that, if you are writing, there has been significant progress recently in Georgia's path toward fuller democracy, and in its relations with the United States and the EU – see the Clinton and Kouchner trips to Georgia in particular and the explicit criticism's of Russia's "occupation" of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia. There also has been increasing complaint about Moscow's violations of the 2008 ceasefire accords, and the problems of governance in both Abkhazia and S. Ossetia.

Anyway, plenty of substance there. Let me know if I can help with interviews or information. Hope you are having a good summer and best regards. John

The Podesta Group provides representation for the country of Georgia. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

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Excerpts from

International Crisis Group (<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/caucasus/georgia/205-south-ossetia-the-burden-of-recognition.aspx>)

State Department's 2009 Human Rights Report
(<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/eur/136054.htm>.)

Human Rights Watch: "Up in Flames" (<http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2009/01/22/flames-0>)

- "The small, rural territory lacks even true political, economic or military autonomy. Moscow staffs over half the government, donates 99 per cent of the budget and provides security." (ICG: South Ossetia: The Burden of Recognition, Executive Summary and Recommendations, June 7, 2010)
- "Moscow has not kept important ceasefire commitments, and some 20,000 ethnic Georgians from the region remain forcibly displaced." (Id)
- "Approximately 20,000 ethnic Georgians fled when Russian troops and Ossetian militias entered their villages on 10 August and have been unable to return. Their homes were systematically looted, torched and in some cases bulldozed by South Ossetian militias even after the 12 August ceasefire. [The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) called those abuses "ethnic cleansing"]. Completely destroyed, the former Georgian villages around Tskhinvali are now inhabited by no more than five mainly elderly families." (Id. P.3)
- "Local analysts estimate 90 per cent of everything sold in South Ossetia is now imported from Russia. The price of basic commodities is 50 to 100 per cent higher than in Russia's southern districts, mainly due to high transportation costs and monopolies. For example, the price of apples has risen after the war from 30 cents to \$1 per kilo; meat has increased from \$5 to \$7 per kilo; while sugar has increased from \$1 to \$1.50 per kilo. If such goods were imported from the rest of Georgia, prices could decline again. However, the presence of large numbers of Russian military and construction workers has also fuelled price hikes." (Id. P. 5)
- Russia's aid to South Ossetia since August 2008 has been massive: 26 billion roubles (\$840 million), about \$28,000 for each resident. This includes rehabilitation and budgetary assistance, as well as Moscow city budget support for a large housing project and Gazprom-funded construction of gas pipelines between Russian and South Ossetia. Yet, aid issues have begun to create a rift between Moscow and Tskhinvali. Relations hit a low in February 2009, when Russia suspended funding after its Accounts Chamber found that only about \$15 million of about \$55 million in priority aid had been delivered and only \$1.4 million had been spent. Until funding resumed the next month, the de facto government was unable to pay salaries, pensions and other benefits, including to its own officials. (Id, pp. 6-7)
- "Both local and Russian analysts agree that if the economy does not develop, the region will in effect turn into a Russian garrison, since the military already accounts for about one sixth of the population." (Id., p. 9)

- “South Ossetian legislation is not adequately developed and is mostly a carbon copy of Russian law...The judiciary is neither independent nor impartial. Procedural violations and delayed investigations and trials are common. Pre-trial detainees, including women and children, are kept with convicted criminals in the same prison.” (Id. p.12)
- “There were no indications that authorities were investigating reports from HRW and other sources that numerous civilians were physically mistreated in the areas under the control of Russian forces in Georgia during the August 2008 conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.” (US **Department of State**, 2009 Human Rights Report: Russia)
- “As an occupying power in Georgia, Russia failed overwhelmingly in its duty under international humanitarian law to ensure, as far as possible, public order and safety in areas under its effective control, instead allowing South Ossetian forces, including volunteer militias, to engage in wanton and wide scale pillage and burning of Georgian homes and to kill, beat, rape, and threaten civilians.” (*Human Rights Watch Report, Up in Flames, January 2009*, p.3)
- “In undisputed Georgian territory, beginning with the Russian occupation of Georgia and through the end of September, Ossetian forces, often in the presence of Russian forces, conducted a campaign of deliberate violence against civilians, burning and looting their homes on a wide scale, and committing execution-style killings, rape, abductions, and countless beatings.” (Id. p.10)

Georgia needs U.S. help in rebuilding, standing up to Russia

By John McCain

Though disagreements remain over how the conflict began, there is no denying that two years ago this weekend, Russian troops crossed an internationally recognized border and invaded Georgia. They attacked all of the country with strategic bombers, pushed deep into its sovereign territory, displaced nearly 127,000 ethnic Georgians from their homes, recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, and established a military occupation that remains in effect.

Much has changed in the past two years -- but not for the better. Russia not only occupies Georgian territory but is building military bases there, denying access to humanitarian missions and monitors, permitting the ethnic cleansing of Georgians in South Ossetia, and working to fortify the administrative boundary lines of the breakaway regions into hardened borders. More than 100,000 ethnic Georgians who fled Russia's invasion remain in a situation of effective displacement, according to U.N. estimates. Even now, Russia is in violation of the cease-fire commitments it made with French President Nicolas Sarkozy.

Despite living under constant Russian threat, Georgia continues to move forward. Nearly 1,000 Georgian troops are fighting alongside us, without caveats, in the toughest parts of Afghanistan. Georgia is strengthening the rule of law, fighting corruption and expanding an economy that the World Bank considers the 11th-best place in the world to do business. Mayoral elections this year in the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, were internationally praised as free and fair. While Georgia's political reforms are a work in progress, European Parliament representatives called the Tbilisi election "a real step toward the democratic development of the country."

In Russia, however, human rights advocates continue to be threatened, abused and even assassinated. Just last weekend peaceful demonstrators, including former deputy prime minister Boris Nemtsov, were beaten and arrested for exercising basic human rights guaranteed in the Russian Constitution. If President Dmitry Medvedev wants a model for political and economic modernization, he could look to Georgia. And if the Obama administration is looking for a relationship that really needs a "reset," it should look to Georgia, too.

The administration has appeared more eager to placate an autocratic Russia than to support a friendly Georgian democracy living under the long shadow of its aggressive neighbor. It has lavished Medvedev with long phone calls and frequent meetings, with only modest foreign policy gains to show for it. Meanwhile, the administration has demonstrated little willingness to engage with Georgia's leadership, to further its NATO aspirations, to help rebuild its defenses or, until recently, even to call Russia's troop presence in Georgia what it is -- an occupation -- let alone pressure Russia to withdraw. The White House and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently made some encouraging statements in support of Georgia; now, they should turn these good words into better policies.

If Medvedev is serious about his vision of a Russia guided by the rule of law, he could bring his government into compliance with the international agreement he made to return Russian forces to their prewar positions outside Georgia. For its part, the Obama administration could rally the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to develop a road map with Russia to end the occupation of Georgia -- an incremental approach that could lead to the withdrawal of Russian troops, the return of displaced persons and the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity. If Russia does not make progress, there should be consequences: Medvedev must know that cooperation on Georgia is a U.S. priority and that if Russia does not deliver on our priorities, he should not expect the United States to deliver on his priorities, such as accession to the World Trade Organization.

Another area where Georgia needs U.S. support is in rebuilding its defenses. Georgia is doing more fighting in Afghanistan than much of the NATO alliance it wishes to join. Yet it has been a struggle to get the administration to provide Georgian troops heading into combat even basic equipment, armored vehicles and replacement parts. Beyond this short-term assistance, Georgia needs long-term support to provide for its own defense. This is likely to entail antitank capabilities, air defenses, early-warning radar and other defensive systems that should not be misconstrued as U.S. endorsement for any Georgian use of force against its separatist regions. Georgia will always be less powerful than Russia, but that is no reason to leave it vulnerable two years after a Russian invasion.

For all the damage it has done to Georgia, and its threats to do more, Russia has failed to achieve its strategic objectives: The democratic government of Georgia has survived and is thriving. The U.S.-Russia relationship should enhance this success, not jeopardize it. We have an opportunity to support Georgia's emergence as a strong, whole and free nation -- but only if we remember who our real friends are.

The writer is a Republican senator from Arizona.

THE GUARDIAN

August 7, 2010

Don't let Georgia down, Cameron

On the second anniversary of the Russia-Georgia war, the UK should follow the US lead and support Georgian sovereignty

By Denis MacShane

This weekend marks the second anniversary of the Russia-Georgia war. A lot of water has passed under the bridge since then, including the "reset button" being pressed by President Barack Obama in terms of relations between the US and Russia. George W Bush was an evangelist for the Georgian people. So was Senator Joe Biden, now the Democratic vice-president.

The switch from a Republican to a Democrat administration in Washington has seen a new,

grownup politics on display. The reset button has yielded tangible benefits for global security, but has not been at the expense of Georgia or other US allies in the Caucasus and former CIS. Last month, Hillary Clinton visited Georgia to defy the notion that better relations with Russia means the White House is dumping Georgia. Far from it. The US secretary of state reaffirmed American support for the Georgian government, led by Mikheil Saakashvili, on her visit to Tbilisi. She made clear that "the US is steadfast in its commitment to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The US does not recognise spheres of influence".

The UK government should do likewise. Europe should continue to call for Russia to abide by the August 2008 ceasefire commitment, including by ending the occupation and withdrawing Russian troops from South Ossetia and Abkhazia to their pre-conflict positions.

Officially, this weekend marks the time when the war started; but the independent international enquiry into war noted that the buildup began several weeks before that when Russian tanks, warships and cyber attackers began manoeuvring towards an inevitable invasion of another sovereign state. It takes two to tango and make war, and Saakashvili fell into Russia's trap as he saw armoured divisions crossing his nation's northern borders and opened fire.

Sovereignty and nationhood has also been very much in the news in recent days. The international court of justice has ruled that Kosovo's declaration of independence (UDI) is legal, after many months of deliberation. It was the example of Kosovo that President Vladimir Putin of Russia used as an excuse to invade Georgia, on the bogus grounds that Russian forces were somehow protecting the "independence" of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The judgment of the ICJ – while obviously welcome in Pristina – does, however, prove how wrong and illegal Putin's arguments two years ago were.

The foreign secretary, William Hague, was correct when he said last week that Kosovo "is a unique case and does not set a precedent". Of course the ICJ cannot make instant decisions, and had it decided the Kosovo "unilateral declaration of independence" (UDI) was legal at the time, it may have only fuelled Putin's determination to invade sovereign Georgian territory. His warped thinking was: if the Americans can support a UDI for Kosovo, then why should not Russia act to support similar moves in South Ossetia and Abkhazia? Warped thinking indeed. No parallel can be drawn between the self-determination of Kosovo and the Russian occupation of Georgia's regions.

Kosovo's UDI followed an international intervention aimed at stopping the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo Albanians – the vast majority of the population of the region – led by the central authorities of the Serbian Republic. In Georgia's case it was totally different. In the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia there was an ethnic cleansing of the vast majority of the population (ethnic Georgians and other ethnic groups) by Russian "peacekeeping" troops and their proxies, in the form of Ossetian militias. Therefore recognising the pseudo independence of the occupied territories – in fact, a rampant annexation by the Russian Federation – would validate ethnic cleansing as a tool to change international borders.

But let us not dwell so much on the past. There is good news to talk about in terms of the

measures the Georgian government is taking to seek to live with the continued occupation of 20% of its territory (and that Russia remains in breach of all six points of Nicolas Sarkozy's peace plan negotiated two years ago). The government of Georgia has accepted it will not seek or expect to take back its sovereign territories by force. So instead it has drawn up a constructive plan to continue to develop trade, economic, cultural and language links with the occupied territories.

The Russians may be trying to give the Abkhazs and Ossetians Russian passports, but Georgia's minister for reintegration, Temuri Yakobashvili, must be praised for his innovative and ambitious "Action Plan for Engagement" document published this summer. The plan includes concrete steps to build bridges between the different communities. On a recent visit to Tbilisi, Cathy Ashton, the EU foreign policy chief, welcomed the strategy as "a significant step forward towards a policy of engagement with the populations living in the regions". She is right with her analysis that "reaching out to the populations is a prerequisite for finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict".

And Georgia has been praised by the international community, financial institutions and NGOs for its progress on democratic reforms, including the opposition in drafting a new constitution and election code. The recent local and first mayoral elections in Tbilisi were a success, with an official report by election observers noting that "significant progress" had been made since previous polls. David Cameron defied the wiseacres of traditional diplomacy when he went to Georgia to stand shoulder to shoulder with this tiny but proud nation as it faced a Russian assault by land, sea and air.

Britain, like America, should now make clear that the Kremlin's annexation of the sovereign territory of a member of the UN and Council of Europe is not acceptable. Cameron must not let down Georgia now he is prime minister.

WALL STREET JOURNAL

August 13, 2010

Georgia and the Limits of Russian Power

Moscow's occupation forces remain in the country, but the future looks bright for Tbilisi.

By MELIK KAYLAN

Two years ago this week I watched Russian tanks roll into Georgia. The Russians claimed they were defending South Ossetians from an unprovoked attack, but in fact the Georgians were defending themselves against Russian-backed separatism.

Moscow had invented South Ossetia in Stalin's time as an enclave to give the Russians a foothold on the Georgian side of the Caucasus Mountains, enabling them to exert control over Georgian territory. The South Ossetians were—and are—Moscow's proxies in this strategy.

During the 2008 incursion, I spoke to a Russian tank commander who was being served free beer

and vegetables by a Georgian farmer at a crossroads. "We are here to help the poor people," he said—a propaganda line as Soviet and archaic as Moscow's strategic thinking.

I returned to the area a few weeks ago. The Russians now occupy not just South Ossetia but territory within 20 miles of Tbilisi, Georgia's capital. They have begun building a barrier: sandbags, mud hills, militarized towers and the like which will be supported by military bases Moscow is also building. They clearly plan a long stay. The Russian invasion displaced more than 100,000 Georgians. They remain displaced.

Meanwhile, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev visited the other breakaway enclave, Abkhazia, on Aug. 8 to celebrate its independence, which Moscow officially "recognized" along with South Ossetia's soon after the invasion. He promised to chip in \$300 million to the local economy.

This mini-Iron Curtain, like the one that descended over Europe in the aftermath of World War II, will also be swept away. Yes, it will take time. But artificial zones dependent on Moscow's subsidies are black holes. No competitive legitimate business flourishes there—only corruption, smuggling, gambling, alcoholism and weapons training.

Meanwhile, the World Bank rates Georgia as the 11th easiest country on Earth in which to do business. As for corruption, I personally saw an official Georgian government vehicle stopped and ticketed by a traffic cop for going too fast. This is not something you will see in Moscow.

Two years ago, Georgian officials complained that the Bush administration refused to sell them antitank and air-defense weapons, or admit them to NATO to deter Moscow's hostile plans. When Hillary Clinton visited Tbilisi on July 5, the Secretary of State spoke in gratifyingly blunt terms of the Russian "occupation" but didn't offer the Georgians any deterrent hardware. Moscow was and remains too important in isolating Iran and in allowing U.S. access to Central Asian supply lines to Afghanistan. So is there any more hope for Georgia now than in 2008?

There is. Russian officials then were telling anyone who would listen that their main objective was regime change in Tbilisi. That is not about to happen. The Georgians continue to support their president, Mikheil Saakashvili, and they won't hand Moscow a reward for its brutality.

The Abkhaz and South Ossetians will learn that freedom from Tbilisi but dependence on Moscow is no freedom at all. As they watch American, European, Turkish, Kazakh, Israeli and other investors turn their freer democratic neighbor into a booming Western-style economy while their own territory stagnates behind barbed wire, the process will take care of itself. Russian passports and handouts and pseudo-elections managed from Moscow are no substitute for a real future.

During my recent trip in Georgia, I had dinner with Temuri Iakobashvili, the minister for reintegration. He was not at all gloomy. He intimated that Georgians were talking through back channels to the authorities in the separatist regions toward an eventual rapprochement.

"The invasion proved the limits of Russian power," he said. "They couldn't take over our country

or remove our government. And . . . [t]hey've failed to drag us into their sphere of influence."

Mr. Iakobashvili believes Russia doesn't have the resources to prevail. "It was their last gasp," he said. "Yes, they've occupied strategic terrain and purged our citizens but, soon, it's the very people the Russians supposedly saved who will feel occupied by them. Many already do. Russian subsidies don't reach the general population any more than they do in Russia."

Moscow's neo-Sovietism looks no different than the earlier variety, and it will fail for the same reasons. "The picture is clear," Mr. Iakobashvili told me. "So long as the West is the West and Russia is Russia, the story has a happy ending for us."

Mr. Kaylan is a New York-based writer who has reported often from Georgia.

FORIEGN POLICY

August 9,2010

Resetting Georgia

Amid Obama's foreign-policy woes, his subtle handling of Russia's Tbilisi policy represents a bright spot.

BY BRIAN WHITMORE

TBILISI — Young couples sip wine in sidewalk cafes and children play in fountains, seeking relief from the searing heat. Elsewhere, elderly men play chess on park benches and traders hawk their wares from makeshift kiosks. It's another summer in Georgia's scruffy, chaotic, but charming capital. But there's one change this season: For the first time in years, there are no rumors of war.

The calm contrasts sharply with the tension that gripped the city during the sweltering summer of 2008. Two years ago this week, brinkmanship between Moscow and Tbilisi culminated in Russia's invasion of Georgia. That invasion resulted in the Russian takeover of the breakaway provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, setting up a tense standoff between Moscow and Tbilisi. Georgians were jittery again last summer when fresh saber rattling in Moscow led politicians and pundits to predict -- incorrectly, it turned out -- that armed conflict would break out again.

The fact that Georgians aren't living in fear of a Russian invasion for the first time in years is an unexpected fringe benefit of U.S. President Barack Obama's "reset" policy with Moscow. It also runs counter to allegations by Obama's critics that countries on Russia's periphery such as Georgia would suffer from Washington's rapprochement with Moscow. These concerns have not merely been limited to Obama's partisan rivals: Eastern European luminaries, including former Czech and Polish presidents Vaclav Havel and Lech Walesa, as well as domestic critics such as former State Department official David Kramer, have raised concerns that Obama's Russia policy would leave former Soviet states at Moscow's mercy.

But after initially expressing similar anxieties, Georgian officials now say that closer ties between the former superpower rivals have allowed Washington to exert quiet, yet effective, influence over Moscow and enhance Tbilisi's security in the process.

Among those praising Obama is Giga Bokeria, Georgia's deputy foreign minister and a close confidant of President Mikheil Saakashvili. "The immediate danger of a large-scale attack by Russia has been -- if not completely eradicated -- significantly reduced by a very active position by the U.S. administration," Bokeria told me recently.

He credits Obama's "very concentrated effort" to make Washington's position on Georgia clear to the Kremlin during his first presidential visit to Russia in July 2009. At the time, Obama said he had "a frank discussion" with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, during which he expressed his "firm belief that Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected."

Senior Georgian officials say the U.S. president was even tougher behind the scenes. They claim Obama warned Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin that Washington wouldn't stand on the sidelines if Russia launched another attack against Georgia. The White House would neither confirm nor deny that account, but people in Tbilisi say whatever was said appears to have had an effect.

U.S. policy toward Russia has functioned not just with sticks, but with carrots, too. Giga Zedania, a political scientist at Tbilisi's Ilia State University, says Russia "should have something to lose" if it attacks Georgia. "One of the problems with the Bush administration was that it had no leverage over Russia, because there was no cooperation," she said. "When these links are established...Russia will have more incentive to think twice before it does something like it did in 2008."

Medvedev's visit to the United States in June, seeking U.S. support for Moscow's bid to join the World Trade Organization, offered a prime example of what Russia now has to lose. The president also visited Silicon Valley to court investors for an ambitious plan to modernize Russia's high-tech sector. Moscow knows it can kiss such goodies goodbye if it misbehaves in Georgia, or elsewhere.

Despite the U.S. engagement, relations are still fraught on the Russia-Georgia border. Russian troops sit just 20 miles from the Georgian capital, in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The official policy of the Kremlin, which has long been uncomfortable with Georgian sovereignty, also still calls for regime change in Tbilisi.

But the tense atmosphere of Cold War-style conflict, in which Georgia served as a proxy battleground for the United States and Russia, is clearly fading. And these days, Georgians are asking themselves whether Obama's reset could go even further, facilitating rapprochement, or at least détente, between Moscow and Tbilisi.

Irakli Alasania thinks it can. Georgia's former ambassador to the United Nations, now a leading opposition figure, won widespread praise for his calm and reassuring manner during the Russia-Georgia war two years ago. He told me that if U.S.-Russia relations continue to improve, "it will

only benefit Georgia" by facilitating an eventual normalization of relations between Tbilisi and Moscow.

"At this point what we can do is to not solicit any more aggressive behavior from Russia, to keep things quiet," Alasania says. "[W]e need strong partners. And we need our strongest strategic partner to have a good relationship with the Russian Federation."

Saakashvili, whose political brand is bound up with his confrontational stance toward Russia, has been publicly supportive of Obama's reset with Russia, though officials say that, in private, he still has reservations. "We welcome holding of a dialogue between Russia and the United States," the Georgian president said in June shortly before U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to Tbilisi. "The fact [is] that, under conditions of this dialogue, the United States remains committed to its principled position" on Georgia's territorial integrity.

The Obama administration must remain vigilant in defending Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It should also continue to show Moscow that it has much more to gain by respecting its neighbors -- and much to lose by threatening them.

Whether this proves sufficient in the long run is still uncertain. But speaking softly and carrying a big carrot has so far proved to be an effective policy in the volatile South Caucasus.

Foreign Policy

The Georgia Syndrome

Two years after a disastrous war, Tbilisi is booming, but Georgians remain on edge, for one overriding reason: They're not sure Barack Obama loves them enough.

BY JAMES TRAUB | AUGUST 13, 2010

Over the course of the last week, Russia has celebrated the second anniversary of its war with Georgia in typical style: A visit by President Dmitry Medvedev to the breakaway province of Abkhazia, which Russia now recognizes as an independent country, and the announcement by a Russian general that the air force had stationed in Abkhazia the S-300, a highly sophisticated anti-aircraft system, to counter unspecified Georgian threats. While the Georgians, who tend to treat each new act of Russian provocation as a prelude to apocalypse, reacted with alarm, a State Department spokesman waved off the S-300 as old news. President Barack Obama's administration has tried -- successfully, so far -- to strike a balance between defending Georgia and preserving the "reset" with Russia. But what will it do if Russia simply refuses to withdraw from territories seized in an illegal and unjust war?

Grossly inferior to Russia in all matters of hard power, Georgia enjoys a crushing soft-power advantage that the Russians must find both bewildering and infuriating. Like Israel, Georgia is a country that many Americans find impossible to think about rationally. Visitors to Tbilisi, the country's charming and ancient capital, quickly succumb to Georgia Syndrome, a blissful

capitulation to hand-on-heart sentimentality, sodden feasts, Mitteleuropean boulevards, and passionate devotion to Western values in the face of threats both real and imagined. I've been half in the bag myself since writing an account of the run-up to the war in the *New York Times* that President Mikheil Saakashvili apparently found highly satisfying. I'm in Tbilisi now at the invitation of the government to deliver a series of lectures, though really to visit my son, who is working as a summer intern with the Ministry of Finance.

It's not just me, of course. When George W. Bush came here in 2005, he danced a little jig of happiness that made him an instant national hero -- and the namesake of Tbilisi's George W. Bush Avenue. Georgia quickly became the unofficial mascot of the president's crusade for democracy; Bush supported providing Georgia a path to NATO membership in the teeth of furious Russian opposition. (He failed.) Sen. John McCain nominated Saakashvili for the Nobel Peace Prize in honor of Saakashvili's central role in the 2003 "Rose Revolution" that brought democracy to Georgia, and Saakashvili to power. (Then-Senator Hillary Clinton was co-nominator.) McCain remains a single-minded Georgia booster: His recent *Washington Post* op-ed, in which he alleged that the Obama administration "has appeared more eager to placate an autocratic Russia than to support a friendly Georgian democracy," was reprinted in full in the *Messenger*, Georgia's highly pro-government English-language daily.

Georgian leaders take a more sanguine view, at least publicly. Temuri Yakobashvili, Georgia's minister for reintegration and a Saakashvili intimate who shares many of his boss's leading traits -- total self-assurance, reckless candor, and spontaneous wit -- said to me, "We believe that the Obama administration is not selling out Georgia." As a candidate, Obama issued a sharp -- if ever so slightly belated -- condemnation of the invasion, and as president he has been unambiguous in his repudiation of Russia's de facto annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the breakaway region where the 2008 war began. Yakobashvili and others were much reassured last month when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Tbilisi and bluntly described the ongoing Russian presence in the two regions as "occupation."

Nevertheless, Georgia has not yet had the chance to work its voodoo on Obama, and Georgians fret that this dispassionate and unfamiliar figure is not the type to succumb to the Syndrome. Insiders worry that while Michael McFaul, the National Security Council (NSC) official responsible for Russia and Eurasia, is philo-Georgian -- McFaul once worked in Georgia for the National Democratic Institute -- Denis McDonough, Obama's longtime advisor and McFaul's superior at the NSC, is a cold-hearted realist. Outsiders ask whether Obama has discarded the principle of "Eurocentrism," which is code for "Western values," or whether he is prepared to sacrifice Georgia to the reset with Russia.

Like Israelis, Georgians are plagued by the uneasy sense that their claims on the United States are moral rather than strategic. Yakobashvili makes the wild assertion that the Russian presence in the South Caucasus threatens NATO's commitment to stopping terrorism, organized crime, and nuclear proliferation -- he says that Russian passports issued to Ossetians have been found on Chechen separatists -- but the truth is that the current stalemate is hardly destabilizing. When I asked Irakli Porchkhidze, deputy secretary of Georgia's national security council, why the West should pressure Russia to withdraw from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, he said, "Russia has

violated the principle of the inviolability of borders; Russia has engaged in ethnic cleansing. Are these not human rights issues?"

The answer is yes, mostly. The ethnic cleansing in question occurred chiefly during the savage civil war of the early 1990s, when forces on all sides committed atrocities. But though disputes remain over who fired the first shot in 2008, in the course of the war Russia violated Georgia's territorial integrity as brutally and unequivocally as Iraq did Kuwait's in 1990. And despite signing a cease-fire agreement requiring both sides to withdraw from the disputed region, Russia has maintained thousands of troops in the region, held the territories as dependencies, and flaunted its contempt for the agreement by moves like the announcement of the S-300, which serves no conceivable defensive purpose. "Our air force has like three and a half planes," Yakobashvili said to me. "What are they going to shoot down -- UFOs?"

Georgia really does pose a problem for its friends. Most of its neighbors in the post-Soviet space have knuckled under to Russia's demand for regional hegemony. Georgia, defiantly, has not. Many of those not wholly under the spell of Georgia Syndrome have urged Saakashvili to stop taunting Russia and its volcanic prime minister, Vladimir Putin; to put aside his aspirations to join NATO; and to mute his strident nationalism. In a recent *Financial Times* op-ed, Thomas de Waal, a regional expert, suggested that Russia is seeking its own "reset" with the West, which could well include reconciliation with Georgia, but added that such change would be impossible so long as Saakashvili, "the sworn enemy of Moscow," as de Waal put it, remained in office. (His tenure runs to 2013.)

Saakashvili is a tempestuous and reckless figure, but Georgians seem to like him that way. He's recouped some, though hardly all, of his popularity from the fiasco of the war, which Georgia lost quickly and decisively, and his opposition is hopelessly divided. The country is booming, and Saakashvili is erecting mighty public works to cement his claim as the second coming of David the Builder, the great 12th-century Georgian leader he has vowed to emulate. He may run as prime minister when his presidential tenure expires, as Putin did (a comparison Saakashvili would not care to encourage). He is, in short scarcely an alien presence. Moreover, it's not too easy to find the alleged signs of Russian moderation toward its neighbors. Putin's Russia -- or Medvedev's -- seems to want compliance, not reconciliation. If Russia's goal were simply to liberate the Abkhaz and Ossetian people from the Georgian yoke, some kind of solution involving substantial autonomy might well be found. But if Russia's goal is to bring Georgia to heel, then it will not withdraw its military presence in the region save under concerted pressure from the West.

And there's the rub. If Russia makes another bid to crush Georgia, the West may react. But what if Moscow is content simply to consolidate its gains? European leaders, many of whom depend on Russia for oil and natural gas, will hardly deem the stalemate sufficient cause to jeopardize relations with Russia. A McCain administration might sacrifice arms control or Iran policy to the great cause of Georgia's sovereign integrity, but neither Obama nor any other president not under the spell of the Syndrome would do so. Russia's occupation of Georgian territory is one of those abuses that one must keep insisting is unacceptable -- even as, in practice, one accepts it, and waits for the moment when compromise solutions become possible.

This is the kind of reality Georgian leaders, so addicted to maximalist claims, need to hear from their friends rather than their adversaries. As we were leaving our conversation at the bar of the Tbilisi Marriott, Yakobashvili told me something an ambassador had recently said to him: "We love Georgia, but we will not love you unconditionally."

James Traub is a contributing writer for the New York Times Magazine and author of, most recently, *The Freedom Agenda*. "Terms of Engagement," his column for ForeignPolicy.com, runs weekly.

WASHINGTON TIMES

August 11, 2010

Russian actions don't jibe with reset

Provocative moves irk U.S.

By Eli Lake-The Washington Times

As the Obama administration is touting the success of its "reset" in relations with Russia, America's former Cold War rival is challenging key U.S. policies.

On Wednesday, the Reuters news agency reported that Russia's largest oil firm, Lukoil, had resumed selling refined petroleum to Iran, a direct challenge to U.S. efforts to apply economic pressure on the Islamic republic.

Meanwhile, the Russian press reported that Moscow would be sending more of its S-300 air-defense systems to the disputed Georgian territory of Abkhazia. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton last month called the Russian troop presence in Abkhazia an "occupation."

The new challenges to the U.S.-Russia relationship come as Moscow is cracking down on dissent and expanding the powers of its domestic security service known as the FSB. On Wednesday, a bipartisan group of foreign policy analysts and human rights advocates, organized by the Foreign Policy Initiative, called on President Obama to personally condemn the crackdowns on Moscow demonstrations that led to the arrest of a former deputy prime minister, Boris Nemtsov.

"Maybe the administration feels they have developed a better relationship with Russia, and maybe they have, but there has not been an improvement in Russian behavior; in fact, it has gotten worse," Sen. John McCain, Arizona Republican, said in an interview Wednesday.

The senator expressed particular worry about Russia's crackdown on human rights. He said a recent law passed by Russia's Duma was "Stalinist" and would give the state the right to arrest "anyone who appears to pose a threat to security."

Mrs. Clinton on Wednesday said the centerpiece of the U.S. reset with Russia was the signing of the nuclear arms control treaty known as New START.

"Actually, I think we've had a remarkable year, not only in the reset of our relations with Russia,

but in furthering the president's policy towards nonproliferation and setting a very ambitious goal of moving toward a world without nuclear weapons, one that has been endorsed by leaders in our country on both sides of the aisle," she said.

Mrs. Clinton pointed to not only the START agreement but also the "strategic dialogue" she chairs with Russia's foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov.

State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley had no immediate response about the report that Lukoil was resuming gasoline sales to Iran.

Lukoil was one of several oil companies that announced in the spring that they were suspending business with Iran, following the U.N. sanctions vote against the Mideast country over its nuclear program.

Reuters reported that Lukoil's trading arm, Litasco, delivered 250,000 barrels of oil to the Iranian port of Bandar-Abbas last week. The news agency also reported that another shipment was expected to be delivered next week.

A Lukoil spokesman told Reuters that "one-off deliveries [to Iran] took place within the frame of previously signed contracts."

In Georgia, the Russian press reported that Russia would be shipping new batteries of the mobile air-defense system known as the S-300 to the disputed territory of Abkhazia, one of two breakaway provinces recognized by Russia as independent countries, but considered by the United States to be Georgian territory.

The announcement of the S-300 sale comes after Russian President Dmitry Medvedev visited Abkhazia on Sunday, marking the second anniversary of the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia.

"There have been systems in Abkhazia for two years. We can't confirm whether they have added to those systems or not," the State Department's Mr. Crowley said Wednesday. "So I — we will look into that. But just — this is, by itself, is not necessarily a new development."

Mr. McCain, the ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said Wednesday that he had just completed a phone call with Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili.

"I am very worried about the continued violation of the cease-fire agreement negotiated by [French President Nicolas] Sarkozy," he said. "I am extremely worried about the continued occupation of parts of Georgia that are in violation of the cease-fire lines. They continue to put military equipment into South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and they continue to threaten Saakashvili."

David Kramer, a deputy assistant secretary of state for Europe and Eurasia during the George W. Bush administration, said it was a mistake for the Obama administration to oversell the reset with Russia.

"My biggest problem with the administration's policy is not the idea of the reset, but the administration's overselling it," he said. "The administration was all giddy about Russian support for the U.N. resolution in New York against Iran. But getting a resolution isn't the end. It's a means to the end."

Mr. Kramer noted that Russia is expected to complete work on Iran's Bushehr nuclear reactor by the end of August. Russia has missed several deadlines for completing that project.

While the U.N. sanctions against Iran include a loophole that would allow Moscow to sell the S-300 air-defense system to Tehran, top Russian military officials have said they are suspending the sale for now.

Earlier this summer, the Russian decision prompted threats from Tehran that Moscow would lose business interests in Iran if it did not follow through on its earlier contract to sell the S-300.

The Russia-Iran relationship on some fronts, however, appears to be warming.

Iran's envoy to Russia, Mahmoud Reza Sajjadi, this month praised the Medvedev government for not joining what it called "unilateral sanctions" against his country. After the passage of the sanctions in June, Russia's prime minister and former president, Vladimir Putin, said in a visit to Turkey that he did not think the sanctions would have an effect on Iran's decision-making process.

Mr. Kramer also noted that the Medvedev government in July hosted Iran's energy minister, another signal that ties may be warming between Russia and Iran.

"All of the comity that there was in New York on Iran seems to be slowly evaporating," he said.

Heather Hurlburt, executive director of the National Security Network and a former foreign policy speechwriter for President Clinton, said Wednesday that reset with Russia has been a success, in part, because of things that had not happened.

"I don't want too sound happy or complacent about Lukoil, but nobody who understands Russia imagines we are going to get a Russian government that does everything we like and nothing we don't like," she said.

"Most important for short-term interests is the relatively smooth flow of supplies into Afghanistan from Russia."

When Mr. Obama took office, the government of Kyrgyzstan, under Russian pressure, threatened to close the Manas air base that NATO countries use for resupply into Afghanistan.

"On Iran, the only reason we have sanctions was because the Russians went along with the U.N. sanctions," Ms. Hurlburt said.

She added: "U.S. and Russian re-engagement on nuclear weapons was both bilaterally useful and

essential to even restart the global conversation on the role of global nuclear weapons. We needed the reset for that as a global priority."

JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION

August 11, 2010

Russian S-300 Deployment in Abkhazia Aims Beyond Georgia

By Vladimir Socor

Russian state news agencies announced today (August 11) that Russia's armed forces have deployed the advanced S-300 air defense missile systems in Abkhazia, a territory that Moscow recognizes as "independent." In a parallel move, air defenses of other types have been deployed in the Russian-recognized South Ossetia.

According to Russia's air force Commander-in-Chief, Colonel-General Aleksandr Zelin, the purpose of these air defenses is to avert "border" violations in the air and destroy any aircraft penetrating those territories' "air space." The Russian military is known to have been building a base for air defense systems at Nalamus, a location on the Satanjo Mountain in the Gali district in southern Abkhazia, following the 2008 military occupation of the area.

Georgia has no air force and no intention to acquire one (nor does it have conventional defense capabilities in the face of Russian forces massed in Abkhazia and South Ossetia). Thus, Russian S-300s in Abkhazia cannot conceivably aim at Georgian air targets.

The Russian deployment's most likely goal is to create a capability for interdicting Georgian, or indeed US and NATO, flights over the adjacent Black Sea area, Georgia's interior, and the South Caucasus air corridor. Russian interdiction capability can deter Georgia, the United States and its allies from using those flight paths in certain contingencies; or can compel them to clear their flight plans with Russia in certain situations. Such contingencies may include another Russian invasion of Georgia complete with an air blockade; or US air operations in the South Caucasus, in the context of possible hostilities with Iran; or demonstrating Russian air interdiction capability along the allied supply corridor to Central Asia and Afghanistan, potentially rendering its use negotiable with Moscow.

Russia's S-300 deployment is the latest in a series of unlawful moves to restrict Georgian and international flight paths in the region. Such moves followed one after the other, without an international response, and revealing US and allied self-inflicted weakness in this region. In the spring of 2008 (while pouring additional ground troops into Abkhazia), Russia banned any flights, including civilian ones, not authorized by itself in Abkhazia's "air space," including the adjacent Black Sea area. In early summer 2008, the Russian air defense shot down several Israeli-made Georgian unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV's), so as to blind Georgia and its allies to the Russian troop movements in Abkhazia. Those troops were already poised to attack before August 2008.

The next stage in this sequence is especially instructive, although it remains under-analyzed. In

2008, Russia successfully pressured Israel to cease delivering UAVs (and, afterward, any military equipment) to Georgia. Despite its special relationship with Georgia, Israel complied when Moscow threatened to deliver S-300 air defense systems to Iran, and heavy rockets to Hezbollah. At the same time, Russia proceeded to invade Georgia and occupy its territories. The Israeli angle of these events was well covered by Israeli media at the time; and became a subject of retrospection with the Georgian ambassador in that country, on the war's second anniversary (Haaretz, August 3).

Thus, Moscow compelled one close US ally, Israel, to desist from aiding (with non-lethal defensive means) another close US ally, Georgia. The United States seemed unable to protect one ally from Russian blackmail and the other ally from Russian invasion. In combination, those developments could be seen as harbingers of unraveling in the US-led alliance system. NATO seemed uninterested and Washington took no public notice of the implications, at the time or since then. Ultimately, Washington itself withholds from Georgia the basic means for defense while Russia is augmenting its forces in the region. The dissipation of US resources in Iraq and Afghanistan--along with US perceived need of Russia on Iran--has opened the window of opportunity for Russian re-expansion.

The S-300 deployment in Abkhazia follows in the wake of announcements about prolongation of Russia's military presence in Armenia for decades to come. Under a Russian-drafted protocol, expected to be signed by Presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Serge Sarkisian in Yerevan shortly, Armenia will extend Russia's basing rights in Armenia for decades to come. The existing agreement, signed in 1995, entitles Russia to use the Gyumri base in Armenia (on the Turkish border) for 25 years, until 2020. The additional protocol, as confirmed by Armenia's National Security Council Secretary, Artur Bagdasarian, would extend that period past 2020 for another 24 years, or a total of 49 years until 2044, "with the possibility of subsequent extensions." Moreover, the protocol would broaden the scope of Russian troops' mission so as to include defense of Armenia (Interfax, July 30; PanArmenianNet, Armenian Public TV, August 4, 5).

In parallel, Moscow has orchestrated media stories about possible delivery of S-300 PMU2 air defense systems to Azerbaijan. These stories may seem designed to hint at a consolation prize to Azerbaijan. The deeper meaning, however, is that Russia is bidding to become an uncontested hegemon in the South Caucasus through hard power instruments, including manipulation of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and seizure of Georgian territories.

GLOBAL POST

August 6, 2010

Georgia aspires to end Russian occupation

Two years after the Russians invaded, the Georgian government has a plan to reunify its people.

By Temuri Yakobashvili

TBILISI, Georgia — Two years ago this Sunday, as Russian forces poured over Georgia's internationally recognized borders into the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and beyond, a

humanitarian crisis began to unfold.

Georgian civilians were driven from their homes and villages by advancing Russian troops. Although the war lasted only a few weeks, the suffering continues for thousands of Georgian citizens who remain unable to return home, as well as for those who continue to live under Russian occupation.

The European Union-brokered cease-fire that brought an end to open conflict between Russia and Georgia required Russia to work toward the safe and dignified return of all internally displaced persons and refugees to their homes. The cease-fire rejected the use of force as a means of altering borders in 21st century Europe and required Russian forces to withdraw to their pre-war positions and to respect Georgia's territorial sovereignty.

As French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner recently made clear, "Russia has failed to meet certain paragraphs of the agreement." But this cannot keep the government and the people of Georgia from working toward the goals laid out in the cease-fire.

In the two years since the war, the government of Georgia has made great progress in the necessary work of rebuilding our country and our economy and developing the democratic institutions that will sustain both. We have also embarked on a bold plan for reintegrating South Ossetia and Abkhazia back into Georgian democracy, even as Russia has moved to make permanent its illegal occupation of Georgian territory.

Though the government of Georgia does not control Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the international community recognizes the two areas as occupied Georgian territory — and we recognize that all those who live there, and all those who wish to return to their homes there, are entitled to the same rights and protections of Georgian citizenship as their compatriots living outside these occupied territories.

To this end — and in concert with civil-society organizations, NGOs, foreign governments and international organizations — the Georgian government has laid out a strategy for building economic and social partnerships between the populations living on both sides of the current boundaries. Through this program, and recognizing that there can be no military solution to this problem, we aim to achieve the voluntary reunification of communities that are now divided by checkpoints and barbed wire.

We will soon establish a Cooperation Agency to promote business development in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and in the adjacent areas of Georgia. We will help integrate them into international markets by establishing a quality-control lab to certify local products to international standards. And we will establish a private fund to aid joint ventures across the dividing lines in order to support businesses that might otherwise have difficulty attracting investment.

Infrastructure also will be developed, with funds set aside for the rehabilitation of roads in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as the establishment of bus service between them and Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, and a passenger ferry between the Black Sea ports of Batumi and Sokhumi.

We have even proposed providing free internet service to the whole of Abkhazia, together with free laptops to primary-school students there (as will be standard elsewhere in Georgia). Our plan also would grant residents of both areas equal access to Georgian universities and scholarship programs for study abroad.

These are just some of the programs that will be established in order to prevent communities separated by this conflict from being permanently severed economically, socially and politically from Georgia and from the international community.

There is no question that the path to reunification will be a long and difficult one, and we harbor no illusions about the challenges we face in implementing our engagement strategy. But it is the responsibility of the Georgian government to make every effort to engage and support its citizens in Abkhazia and South Ossetia — not only to prevent their economic and political isolation, but to speed the day when internally displaced people and refugees can return to their homes.

Still, Georgia and the international community must continue to stand firm on the principle that borders cannot be changed through violence and aggression. Such methods in past centuries brought nothing but war, instability and tragedy.

What we aspire to is the end of occupation, the peaceful reunification of our country and the day when all citizens of Georgia — regardless of their ethnicity — can live together in peace and prosperity, determining their own future, and assuming their rightful place in a free and democratic Europe.

Temuri Yakobashvili is Georgia's Deputy Prime Minister and State Minister for Reintegration.

THE HUFFINGTON POST

August 5, 2010

The World Court's Decision on Kosovo Reinforces Georgia's Case

By Payam Akhavan

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Professor of International Law, McGill University in Montreal, Canada

On July 22, the International Court of Justice delivered an advisory opinion holding that Kosovo's declaration of independence in February 2008 "did not violate any applicable rule of international law." While analysts have underscored that the opinion resonates far beyond Kosovo, it is also worth noting that the ICJ's ruling unambiguously confirms that Russia's continuing occupation of Georgian territory is a flagrant violation of international law.

The legal question before the court was "narrow and specific" and did not deal with whether or not territorial secession is lawful. The UN General Assembly asked only whether or not the

declaration of independence is in accordance with international law. It did not ask about the legal consequences of that declaration. It did not ask whether or not Kosovo had achieved statehood. It did not ask about the validity or legal effects of the recognition of Kosovo by those states that have recognized it as independent. The opinion thus leaves unanswered the validity of Kosovo's status as a state and its recognition by the international community. The ICJ knew that affirming Kosovo's independence would have created a chaotic precedent for "breakaway regions" around the world.

But the ruling that Kosovo's declaration of independence was not illegal exposes Russia's predicament in 2008. Back then, Moscow opposed Kosovo's secession; paradoxically, however, Russia would soon invoke that same secession to annex two regions of Georgia. In August of that year, following a series of deliberate provocations, Moscow launched a massive invasion of Georgia in support of "ethnic separatists" in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Under the guise of self-determination, Moscow supported the ethnic cleansing of Georgians from these regions and recognized them as independent states, even though they remain subject to Russian domination and control.

For Georgia, the most pertinent passage in the Court's decision is its reaffirmation Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, a fundamental principle holding that states "shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State." In the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia remains an occupying power in these territories. Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia was clearly dissimilar from a situation of aggression and the annexation of territory by another state.

Another fundamental distinction is that, as recognized by the UN tribunal for former Yugoslavia, the majority Kosovar Albanians were victims of ethnic cleansing by the Milošević regime. This is the exact opposite of what happened in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where Russian-backed proxies pushed out the vast majority of the population--largely Georgians, as well as Greeks, Armenians, Jews, and other non-Abkhaz or Ossetian ethnicities, who in the early 1990s made up over 80% of the population of these territories. They were expelled through what the UN, European institutions, and human rights NGOs have recognized as a systematic campaign of terrorization, mass-expulsion, and wanton destruction of towns and villages. Almost 10 percent of Georgia's current domestic population is internally displaced persons with little hope of returning to their homes in the foreseeable future, since Russia continues to occupy about 20 percent of Georgia.

Russia has portrayed itself as a defender of human rights while actively participating in the ethnic cleansing of Georgians, and it has succeeded in this campaign through an expensive and carefully implemented public relations campaign. To this day, Russia validates its crimes against Georgians by recognizing its ethnic separatist proxies in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as "independent states." As part of its Orwellian propaganda, Russia has attempted to invert the role of aggressor and victim by turning international law on its head.

As atrocities were being committed with Russian support in the Georgian territories, Moscow made an empty threat to take Georgia to The Hague. Instead, it was Georgia that brought Russia before the World Court in August 2008. And it is Russia that has done its utmost to escape

accountability by arguing that the Court has no jurisdiction to hear the complaint on behalf of the victims in Georgia. While a final judgment is still pending, an interim decision in October 2008 recognized that widespread acts of discrimination and violence had occurred and that Russia was responsible to the victims.

So while news reports on the Court's opinion on Kosovo make reference to the potential impact on separatist causes around the world, the decision only strengthens Georgia's case that victims of ethnic cleansing have an undeniable right to return to their homes and villages and that Russia's illegal occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia must end. The international community must ensure that these fundamental principles of justice are upheld.